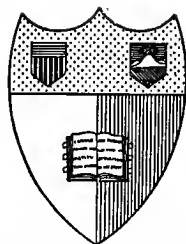




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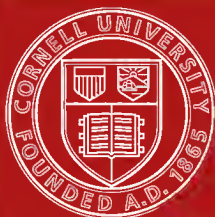
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SOME ASPECTS OF LITERATURE

POEMS : 1916-20

BY

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY

LONDON

RICHARD COBDEN-SANDERSON

17 THAVIES INN

1921

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TO
THOMAS HARDY
THESE POEMS, ALTHOUGH UNWORTHY,
ARE DEDICATED
IN DEVOTION AND GRATITUDE

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RETURN

An hour and I shall see you. Delicately
A light will pass across your wakening eyes ;
They will be smiling, steady, saying to me :
“ There was no parting, all those days were lies.
I left you on the instant.” I will hesitate
Whether to kiss you, but a second gone
Since last we kissed ; decide when all too late ;
Then wonder would a year of love atone.

You, knowing my mind, will smile and touch my hand.
Or did you touch it then ? . . . Ah, no, an hour,
A leaden hour, that will not understand,
But moon-faced mocks me from the tall clock-tower
And will not lock the door upon the band
Of devil doubts that hold me in their power.

1916

THE OPENING OF A TALE

Love's faint-heart lover, who treasured a gift,
A little gift in once upon a time,
Was moved beyond himself to cast out thrift
And give it to a princess from a clime
Where only words of love are ever spoken,
Who could not understand the speech of men
Who carried with her but her soul for token
Of her high birth, which being beyond their ken
She did not show but claspèd to herself again.

And so she wandered, looking upon the world
Wildered as one who knew not where to love,
Save in the shining dreams of memory curled
About her child heart which nothing could move,
Not praise—for she was wondrous beautiful,
And some one with a wizard pen at birth
Had drawn her brows, from some enchanted pool
Had brimmed her eyes, trembling with deeper mirth,
Nearer to profound tears than any of this earth.

Her ears were fashionèd into a form
Most like to tiny shells such as are found
Tangled among the couch-grass which the storm
Wraps round them tenderly upon the ground ;
Her mouth was made for other speech than ours,
Not to belie her inward purposes
Or curb her longings by the feignèd powers
Of dull conformity, but to express
The native gesture of her love in loneliness.

For she was lonely ; was she not a child
By royalty and wisdom, captive made
Among unlovely men, beating her wild
Impetuous wings in anguish, and dismayed
By the cold hatred of their vacant eyes
Which stripped her bare so she stood shivering
But proud, a never to be conquered prize,
A child of other worlds, a perfect thing
Vouchsafed to justify this world's imagining ?

Not praise could move her, for to her it seemed
Of love the gross and barren counterfeit,
Dull from the die, never to be redeemed
With true affection, but by man's deceit
Made current in the cruel market-place,
Yet whispering dimly of a finer gold
Carved without blemish, with the splendid grace
Of high design, not with ten thousandfold
Of other similars from a mechanic mould.

She dreamed of gifts unbartered which to buy
None would dare ask, and none could ever sell
(For merchants have them not), things secretly
With slow pains fashioned in the inmost cell
Of the human heart, grotesque and wonderful,
Things that a man would hide from his own eyes
For fear of his own laughter, things too full
Of aching aspiration and surmise,
Beyond all use save one, beyond all price.

Beyond all use save that it should be given
Once wholly and for ever, with strong hands
From its deep hiding-place suddenly riven,
Tendered with downcast eyes the while he stands
Trembling, shamefast, with apprehension sick,
By stress of sacrifice the virtue all departed
Out of his soul, distraught by lunatic
Strange fears lest his gift should go unregarded
And he be left Time's fool, crazy and broken-hearted.

Such giving did she dream, which to requite
Should be a sudden, flooding ecstasy,
The casket of her heart unlockèd quite
And rent the stubborn veil of memory,
The whisper of a long forgotten tongue
Piercing her soul with a delightful pain,
The great stone that her heart had closed so long
Rolled clean away, and she step forth again
A princess manifest, a child withouten stain,

Who, long since pillowed in the dreams so deep
That are our life, yet heard the timid voice
Of one who also turned within his sleep
And cried ; so she awoke and without noise
Arose and went on tip-toe to his side
And softly stroked his face and softly said
Some little foolish words which did abide
To comfort him, while she remembered [fled.
Where they had played together when the bright day

1916

TO MY DEAD FRIENDS

O never-returning travellers, O friends,
Ye that have known me, O shall this be all ?
Ye whom I knew, to these appointed ends
Was all our loving bound ? How shall I call ?
Across what empty spaces of the night ?
O lovely dead, lying so cold away,
Infinite years away, O little light,
O dwindling voice, O darkness of the day,
Ye knowers that I knew, infinite years away.

Did I not love you that you should not speak ?
Not unto death I loved you, but to be
Ever my even comrades, with me seek
Heights that I cannot trust my eyes to see ;
Yet when I turn for true report to you,
You stand so silent-smiling in the way
Like little children, knowing false from true.
And one there is with you of yesterday,
My own self that I knew, infinite years away.

Come back to me, and with you bring the child
I knew and know not ; bring myself to me.
Let time be blotted out, the years beguiled
Back to the nothingness that evilly
Hounds them upon the past ; let the steep wall
Of aching impotence be torn away
That I may be no more the future's thrall,
The lonely pinioned pilgrim of to-day
Who once went hand in hand, infinite years away.

Was it that you did weary of the road,
Suddenly turned aside, behind a bend
Under a hedgerow hiding, while I strode
Into a shadowed valley without end ;
And there you whispered of a knowledge found
Unknown to me, some sweet and secret way
Through flowers, that hid your hurrying footsteps'
 sound,
And in that path for ever with the day
You wander on without me, infinite years away ?

Or was it I who tarried, you who strode
A great league onward, having seen a sign
Beyond the low horizon of the road,
Going your way and leaving me to mine ?
Or did you call me and I did not hear ?
Or did you beckon as I went astray ?
The echo of my footsteps dulled my ear ;
My head was bent upon the dust alway.
Shall I remember this, infinite years away ?

But this I shall remember. In a place
There was a sudden silence ; neither voice
Of friend, nor song of bird, nor echoing pace
Broke through the solitude with any noise.
There was a sudden darkness ; neither face
Of friend, nor form of flower, nor light of day
Shone for me in that hour. There was no trace
Of the high hill that pointed out the way,
When you had gone from me, infinite years away.

And yet I see you strangely smile at me,
Telling me that our paths shall meet again
On the high hill we looked for ; there shall we
Look out together far across the plain
With instant knowledge that we never parted
Through all the seconds of a little day,
The child I knew return to me bright-hearted
To share my secret, with my soul to stay
And banish all that is infinite years away.

So let the journey end, so let us meet ;
You shall be fragrant with the scent of flowers,
Your eyes be musical, your dewy feet
Have freshly trod the lawns for timeless hours,
O young and lovely dead. But these my eyes
Be dulled with too long seeking of the way,
Scarred be my feet, no final glad surprise
Shall lift my head bowed by a mortal day.
Though met, ye still shall be infinite years away.

Ah no ! it shall not be. I shall be young.
Though I shall give the years my body's age,
That which I gave to you shall rest among
Your everlasting youth, a heritage
Put out to your most loving usury
Which, though my eyes be dim, my head be grey,
Knowing my own, I shall go joyfully
Through all the labours of a mortal day
Holding myself with you, infinite years away.

LONELINESS

O loneliness, of this proud heart be queen.
Grant me a lover's privilege : to hold
Thee ever closer to my soul, be bold
To lift the veil that hides thy form unseen,
To trample down the terrors that have been
Thine own grim guardians, driving me to old
Back from the brink of new, and from the untold
Back to the weary lie of things terrene.

Let drop thy veil, let lift my weight of fear
So I may gaze in thy cold, lucid eyes
Till I shall see the void become the all,
And, pressed to thy slow-heaving bosom, hear
Thy silence fill the world, and I am wise,
Yet without fear, and sad, yet without gall.

1918

SURMISE

Whether this painèd longing that is mine
Is incident to true humanity
Whose slumbering soul hath slowly woke in me,
And stretched his quivering arms to some divine
Immutable perfection that doth shine
Most certain and most manifest in thee,
Most potent with a strange serenity
Which serves a final harmony for sign—

God knows ; or that remote, unsleeping eye
Which smiles upon the pattern which our joys
Weave on the warp of pain, and patiently
Mirrors their unknown beauty in the poise
Of sad-sweet contemplation, whereof I
Through love of thee make surmise, and rejoice.

1918

SERENITY

I ask no more for wonders : let me be
At peace within my heart, my fever stilled
By the calm circuit of the year fulfilled,
Autumn to follow summer in the tree
Of my new-ordered being. Silently
My leaves shall on the unfretting earth be spilled,
The pride be slowly scattered that shall gild
A windless triumph of serenity.

Vex me no more with dreams ; the tortured mind
Hath turned and rent the dreamer. Foreordain
My motions, and my seasons solemn lead
Each to his own perfection whence declined
Their measured sequence promise shall contain,
And my late-opened husk let fall a seed.

1918

A BUS RIDE IN TIME OF WAR

The immense night o'erhung me. "Whither go?"
I whispered, and my soul made no reply.
Therefore we brethren wandered, crouching low
Under the breathless brooding of the sky.

"What if the end be now?" I murmured.
"What if the little flame which I did tent
Within my jealous hands against the dread
Dark wind of desolation now be spent?"

My soul no answer made, save that he bore
More closely to my side: I could not tell
Whether of dream or death the mask he wore
Nor against my ignorance could I rebel.

Thus was it written; thus should we be lost
After these bitter years, and only thus,
Each to the other blind, should we be tossed
Back to the chaos that united us;

Weary of fruitless voyage, with such yearning
Each for the other filled that we would part
Without a pang, and with a gentle turning
Of each proud head, a withering of each heart,

Pass to the bosom of forgetfulness;
No more remember how our loving died;
No more each other comfort with the press
Of lockèd hands; no more our eyes hold wide

In expectation of the wondrous hope,
With which we should each hungry other cheat
No more ; and no more laugh, and no more grope
Each for the other through his doubt's deceit.

All these would be forgotten. Therefore we
Rebelled not that we could no longer tell
Whether we dreamed or died. Incessantly
The street-lamps flickered us a pale farewell.

How many thousand years we winged the void,
Each on his lonely way ; how many pains
Did sharply pierce us through ; whether we joyed
Companions still ; or whether aught remains

For record in the scroll of timeless being
Of what we suffered : I know not. We met
Once more ; once more we whisper softly, seeing
A golden hope once more, and we forget.

1918

AN INDUCTION TO AN UNWRITTEN POEM

To such high themes I turn that higher none
May haunt my soul with a presentiment
Of unsubstantial victory. There is one
That will not suffer that this instrument
Should sound to less intention, though the strings
May shatter at the strain, the heart be rent
By longing for that beauty, whose dark wings
Do fan the mind to a bewilderment
Of destiny and dumbness and forgotten things.

Therefore do thou, O power, O influence
That turns me thus aside from old delights
Robbing them of their subtlest quintessence
By the strange poison of more perfect sights
And premonitions of a mastery
To which the slow ascending step affrights
With knowledge of the impossibility.
Of any backward turning : let thy spirits
Attend me now and whisper of supremacy.

Tell me that I may know thee, comfort me
With dream-beholden stirrings of thy veil
That I may know thou livest ; let me see
Fierce fragmentary lights which may prevail,
Down-darting on to my mortality,
Against the child within me who doth quail
At his cold gazing brother's cruelty
And with imploring eyes and forehead pale
Weeps for the icy stillness of his destiny.

O comfort this my brother lest he die ;
Send down on him thy blinding anodyne
He may not hear me when my lips deny
The warm love that he gave to me, at thine
Unswerving and inexorable demand ;
And let my backward eyes behold no sign
That he hath felt the coldness of my hand,
His arms unlacing, that my neck entwine
And will not let me go to thy forgetful land.

So may I see him in calm adoration
Pierced by thy ray, when at the last I turn,
Rebellious yet to my own resignation,
And pricked by love's last leaping flame, I turn
To seek in his star-lonely bended head
Some witness that, though now I must return
To that which flung me forth, I too have fed
On human hopes, within me too did burn
A fire of love until thy calm light struck it dead.

Let this have been a dream, and let him stand
Lovely as thine own child at the last bound
Of this deep valley earth, and with his hand
Bid me go forward till I shall have found
Grace that shall make me worthy of his love.
So shall I know that, through the throbbing wound
Of my tense aspiration doth prove,
By lonely echo, silence without bound,
Through utter loneliness I to communion move.

Ah no, my brother, comfort me no more
With golden visions of humanity.
'Tis thou that whisperest : " Pass but through the door
And we shall behold wonders. Necessity
Shall there disclose her beauty, and we poor,
We trusting-doubtful hearts, shall surely see
Why we, so long tormented and so sore,
Were sundered when the sun-clear certainty
Of promise through the last long shrouding night
upbore."

Whisper no more, sad heart, whisper no more ;
My breaking heart will break my bravest song.
Thou'll make me coward yet, and from the door
Draw back my trembling foot for the great wrong
That I must do our love. Thy whisper brings
Out of the tomb where resolution strong
Hath thrust him down, our lovely dream of things
Too human ;—closest comradeships along
The loneliest paths and most perfect surrenderings

Of pride and sweeter falsehoods unto man
When most remotest from him ; bounteous living
Of time-sequestered souls to whom the span
Of doubtful joy and sorrow, wayward striving
Hath been the wise and wistful evidence
They children are in whom is knowledge, giving
The armour of more candid innocence,
And gentle utter nakedness outliving
The cap-a-pie of duty and the reason's fence.

Cheat me no more, my brother, let there be
No stain of hope upon my blanchèd soul,
No residue of my mortality
To clog the ray outpouring from the pole
Of light eternal ; let no blinding tears
For what I was, for what I am, unroll
Their rainbow curtain interwov'n of fears
And fear-sublimèd hopes, tainting the whole
Of my so sadly purchased vision of the years.

Love me no more, I charge thee, get thee gone.
Thou knowest that I loved thee ; yea, our love
Did pass the love of women. There is one
In whom our flame eternally doth move,
Whereunto I am witness, I am ta'en
By this most bitter sacrifice to prove—
Ah, woe is me—that all our human pain
Is but the blood-money of that above
Which foully hath in me all joy and sorrow slain.

Love not the scapegoat of humanity.
Love me no longer : yea, love thou not aught ;
And love not love, for this shall surely be
A sudden spear thrust through thy living thought,
A poison that will chill thy warmest blood,
To strange adventure in the desert brought
Or in the frozen wastes of the great flood,
Within the toils of lonely knowledge caught
Of that which lies beyond the evil and the good.

Then shalt thou leave thy brother as I thee ;
He shall thy child-heart be as thou art mine
And he shall bend his head as I do see
Thy bended head ; and so his arms shall twine
About thy neck as thine press me forlorn.
Then shalt thou shut thy staring orbs, as I
Shut mine ; and as thine arms are torn,
With this same chill despairing ecstasy [born.
So shalt thou kill the child of thine own soul's love

Thou canst not love me now, for thou art dead
And I who killed thee shall as surely die.
O mighty, bitter love that entered
A soul so frail and loving-kind as I,
Passion of love and beauty, fire transcending
The mortal substance of the clay it burns,
Light that revealeth purer light unending,
Till at the pinnacle of flame it turns
And pierces him who fed it to his own heart-rending,—

Thee will I sing, or in sad incantation,
Knowing no joy, but such necessity
As shall inform my speech with desolation
Of highest human purpose, call to thee.
Visit me now, for I the latest born
Of all thy priests do stand in agony,
A weaker soul by greater longing torn,
Called in despite of all humility
To sadder ministration, keener woe to mourn.

THE DIRGE OF ANGELICA'S WOMEN

O infinite beauty afar,
Out of the radiant soul of man clear-streaming,
Thou beam eternal,
Thou chariot immortal,
Whose diamond-hooved horses shatter the hours from
 their seeming,
Thou spear-swift star,
We are thine.
Let thy sheer crystal ray
Down-dropping from thy warm eternity,
Smite the last chain of life that binds us to the days
Of blind, slant-creeping time.
Let us obey
The shining impulse of our souls to thee,
Ethereal birds of praise
Winging their starry and unspotted way
Like flames of music to thy lūcent throne,
Yea, let the still notes of our melody
Descend like plumes of frozen fire
And burn cool channels to her bursting heart.
Let it not break
Save at the shattering finger-touch of thee
Who shaped her to thy angel.
To us impart
That infinite persuasion of song,
Struck out from thy all comprehending ray
By the tense bow of upward urging souls,
Plangent and strong. . . .

1918

THE FORGOTTEN POET

Of poets whom I knew the chief was one
Who with his slender pipe scarce held in drooping
 fingers
Stared at the tedious sun
And thinking on that sun's sun he dreamed of time
Ticked by a pendulum sublime
That swept
Inept
From nothingness into oblivion
Once in a hundred years.

I think I knew that he could weep no tears
Long, long ago. Yet what of his chill piping lingers ?
A rustling of dry fears
In some tight-lockèd chamber of the mind
Of me, or some quaint other of my kind,
Once caught
By a thought
Of the bland immobility that wears
The heart out of a hundred hundred years.

1918

LOVERS AND GHOSTS

In the still hour we whisper of strange ghosts,
Consort with our dead peers, call up the hosts
Of lovers where bright petals slowly fell
In secret gardens, delicate miracle
Unmarked of men. No story has been told
Of what they did of fragrance rare unfold
In lingering airs blown by the rushing wind
Of heedless multitudes, who being blind
And one in blindness, have their history.

But these have none : what legend shall there be
Of these our brothers ? Or shall we unbind
The hidden knowledge of a lover's mind ?
Set once again the whispered perfume free ?
Shake the dim branches of the fruited tree
That grows within the garden of our soul ?
Or give the dull-tongued world to drink the bowl
Of the sweet vintage which ourselves did press
Untaught of unbelieved happiness ?

No, let the ghosts of lovers drink with us
Who have no need of speech superfluous.
In their eyes we are worthy ; they in ours :
For they have known the magic of such hours
As we know when the future droops her wings
About our nestled heads and murmurs things
Beyond our knowledge and out-topping hope,
And yet within some unimpeded scope
Of the soul's certainty.

For she doth pledge
That when we reach the sheer unfathomed edge

Of joy, surrendered in the sign
Of union with the unalloyed divine
Each of the other, in the perfect end
Of all our deep desire, she will defend
The loveliness of our mortality
Against the death that waits it. We'll not be
Mere silver echoes of our voices sounding
As sweetly from the past as the surrounding
Laughter of ghostly lovers now doth fall.
This should be much ; yet this shall not be all
And, being less than all, it counts for naught
Beside the tremulous promise of one wrought
In our own image, but from elements
Less fair than love sublimed, the quintessence
Of that diviner fragrance which I bear
Sealed in the phial of a heart proved rare
Only by that thou chocest it to fill,
And into it such sweetness didst distil
That they themselves believe not who do say :
—A lover he ? Made of our common clay.
The clay is common, but the scent which clings
Calls back to them their child-imaginings,
Music half-heard of more than common things,
Even as it calls them back to me who grope
Through it to some unconquerable hope
Of comprehending from what royalty
I fell, and thou dost stoop to where I lie
Not in our image therefore, but in thine.
Through thee I touch the fringe of the divine

Remembered purple, which that other thou
And his child's children shall one day allow
Mine wholly, undiminished ; they shall be
Witness to my forgotten majesty,
To all eyes manifest the sons of kings.

This doth the future pledge us ; to these things
We pledge the company of ghosts, who drink
Knowing themselves once more upon the brink
Of reborn love in this conspiracy
Which laughs at time, and grasps eternity.

1918

WHO ARE THESE ?

Who are these who torment me with laughter on
their lips,
Who speak with one another,
Calling aloud and singing like men leaped out of ships
To a new-found land of plenty ; and one outstrips
Their company like to my brother ?

Nay, but they all are like to him ; their voice
Would cheat my ear and smother
My unbelief. They are pard-like and swift in their
poise
As he was when once he leaped to the sudden encounter
of joys.
And yet I know they are other.

Let me stop my ears and remember. Was his singing
After this fashion, in deed ?
Surely the memory-ghost who is stealthily winging
Up from the past comes void without form, comes
bringing
Not him, but the aching desire of him, freed.

Their song is fainter. Let me remember. Was ever
My phantom brother in deed ?
Was he more, was he less than a soul-child born in the
fever
Of aching desire ? Could the grim shears of destiny
sever
Him to a disparate being decreed ?

Lo ! he comes with his face wing-covered. Is it I who
cover
My face with bloodless hands ?
In my heart his slow pulse thrills ; slowly I rise high
over
This stained fragment of eternity and hover
Above the infinite sameness of grey sands.

No more their swift running torments me ; still is the
song
They sang to one another.
Their laughter hath never been : none pard-like from
out of the throng
Sped forth calling aloud to mock my memory of
wrong.
I have found thee, my angel brother.

1919

SUBLUNARY

What is the sense of this late afternoon
Nudging my elbow : D'you care to see the moon,
Just like a dirty post-card seller in the Rivoli ?
We have had tea,

And we shall dine together very soon.
I'll cut a cardboard thought or two, and spoon
Some transcendental soup to show that I am he
Who was at tea,

And shall be again at breakfast. No, by God,
I'll not be down, and they'll not think it odd
I should be absent, nor wonder, nor come to see
What is the matter with me.

Ah, my princess, beloved : what can you
Say to your weary knight ? What can you do
But love him with the passionate tenderness
That hides your own distress ?

But what is love on this late afternoon ?
A warm word whispered to a mocking moon,
A child gazing forlornly through the window-pane
At the unflinching rain.

1919

HEARD MELODY

Write joyful things, my pen ;
Discover laughter, mind ;
Believe humanity in men ;
In suffering beauty find.

The pianola in the room beyond
Ripples a melody such as this
Of a world made crystal in the placid pond,
Finality caught in a kiss.

I copy it ; my pen
Scores all that should be blurred,
And I am struck to the heart again
By the anguish of a word.

1919

TRAIN JOURNEY

For what cause ? To what end ?
Into what nameless disaster speeding
Through a twilit cavern of space unheeding,
Through vapours of tears, with a numb heart bleeding,
Torn from what friend ?

Cause there is none, nor friend ;
Nor was that joy from which I parted,
But only what is no longer, yet departed
Its voice rings golden to me broken-hearted,
Saying, There is no end.

1919

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SONG

The pitiless undarkened leaves
Translucent as a weary mind
Veil not the stars, but point them through
The punctures of the threadbare blind.

Insufferable dusty airs,
Blowing the lovelocks out of curl
Of time-denying dowagers
And any ordinary girl

Who risks beneath the nurse-blue sky,
Praying to see and not be seen,
Supine upon the rigid earth
The embraces of a horse-marine.

Her prayers are vain, and vain my eyes
Averted, for we share the curse
Of being always spied upon
By the unsmiling Universe ;

With which in petulance I join
And stare upon the threadbare blind
Which hardly veils the emptiness
Of my translucent weary mind.

O, obvious eternity !
O, futile, faintly aged moon !
What satisfaction can it be
To make me show my hand so soon ?

FAIRY TALE

In that far country she was once my sister.
I loved her. We were wonderful together.
We hardly spoke. But sometimes when we passed
A peacock swinging on a lotus tree,
Or a humming-bird flying off with a pineapple,
Or a goldfish blowing a bubble kiss to her
Out of the jade pond ; or a ladybird
Lay on her speckled back and danced her baby
Into the lemon sun—she'd press my hand
Suddenly, and I would look into her eyes
Laughing.

And so we wandered hand in hand
By turquoise rivers, over bridges of silk.
When the wise moon rose we bowed ourselves to her
Still holding hands. Then we would launch a boat
That glided to the island where we slept
Delicately in a lacquered summer-house.
Before we slept we sat beside a brazier
And whispered of the things we saw that day,
Giving their names to all, and rolling each day's
wonders
Into a scroll against the night of dreams,
And singing softly :

*Sister, brother
Can no other
Come between.
All that beauty
Holds of wonder
They have seen.*

*One in sleeping,
One in waking
They have been.
I, the sister,
I, the brother
Have no other
Like this sister,
Like this brother,
Ever, ever seen.*

1919

EXPLORATION

Let us go a little deeper than our fears,
Surprise the rearward of our lassitude,
Seek the hard comfort of the bedded rock
Beneath our spring of fears.

There is this quality in love, he said,
That it entwines our orbits though we change ;
But by some subtler and change-governing laws
We may be also led.

If when the He is ice, the She is fire,
The fire of flame or more than burning cold ?
If rare to dense respond, or gem to mist,
To lower, other higher ?

Perhaps the She that moves within his mind
And her He pass each other dully by ;
Or, seeing, turn with a disdainful stare
As from an alien kind.

Is it enough to know that they exist
Inter-determined in a causal chain ?
Should they not rather strain the leash and turn
Experimentalist ?

Not in vain hope of some beatitude
Nor idle fear of a too close duress,
But in desire to triumph over pain
And circumstance and mood ;

They comprehend what Time has done to them ;
What they shall do to Time they meditate.
Shall they seek equal ecstasy, and face
Eternity with phlegm ?

Might they not rather seek some cool recess
Of private indestructibility ;
Explore the solid consequential caves
Of their own otherness ?

Scratch through the silver of illusion's glass
Their name at least, that a faint light be shed
On to the further chamber's basalt floor
Which surely is and was ?

1919

THE WHISPER

To what enchanted twilight fall,
Where things of sense and things of thought
Are to a scarce material
Oneness refined,
Beckons my softly whispering mind ?

Soft, with what whispers too soft whispering
Hath mind envenomed being with a kiss
Whose sullen, unabating sting
Derides the bliss
The mind once whispered—did it whisper this ?

*Only where thou art not shall thy calm be,
Deeper than thy most deep discovery,
Thou finite lover of infinity,
Follow thou me.*

*I am thy not-self perfect shaped by stress
Of the defect of thy own imperfectness ;
Only with me shalt thou, the comfortless,
Ease thy distress.*

*Where at the last thy baffled hungry eyes,
Turning downcast from their high enterprise,
Droop at the veil of heart-inwoven lies.
There I arise ;*

*And the dumb longing in thy soul entwined
That goads thee from the ways of all thy kind,
Pain-marred, self-exiled, mutilate, purblind
Among the blind,*

*Is love of me who love despairingly,
Thy fellow-exile from felicity,
And waste unsought my cold virginity
That is unloosed to be*

*The triumph and the consummation
Of the unstained desire that feeds upon
Love's treachery to love, wherein alone
I to thyself am known.*

*Yet love's defection that alone may see
The hemlock eyes of love's true loyalty,
Being fevered by his canker frailty,
Hath but a dream of me.*

Soft with these whispers too soft whispering
Mind hath envenomed being with his kiss,
And with the poisoned pleasure of his sting
Hath numbed what in me is
All but the ear to hear the whisper whisper this.

1919

A NOTE ON A FRIEND'S CONVERSATION

Yes, frail—

Frail and so delicate I'd never dare to touch her . . .

And do I dare, my friend ?

And shall I ever dare to touch with earthly finger

The intricate perilous gossamer of beauty

Wherewith my path is dappled, though it linger

Before me to the end ?

So frail—

I dare not hold you by the arm, though softly,

My friend, for I am wise.

You would not understand ; my frozen gesture

Would frown upon the timid inclination

That showed itself in such a garish vesture

To faintly questioning eyes.

Too frail—

Ah, never too frail to him who has seen the rainbow

Poised over life, my friend,

Arched high athwart the tremulous exhalations,

Desires and pain, happiness, fears and sorrow,

Tumult and whispers, choices and hesitations—

Life that shall have no end.

1920

VALEDICTORY

We talk of this and that, our brute words blindly shear-
ing

Thin threads that bound us but a moment gone ;
And waves of speech have swept us out of hearing
Who once were one.

Not laughter now nor tears, but only wistful wonder
Perplexes these our empty-echoing eyes
With twilit seeking why we fell asunder
Who once were wise.

Look back upon the past : the curvèd silence broken
Whereon unmeaning words struck musical,—
A memory of a note by viols spoken,
Beyond recall.

Nay, was it truly ours ? Can we have heard it ever
In this keen waking life of disesteem ?
Was it the phantom of our souls' endeavour
After a dream ?

Your frightened eyes seek mine, discover mirrored
anguish
Of loneliness and loss of things divine,
Foreknowledge that even memory will languish,
Yours be as mine.

What tenderness avails ? If Love's own wings should
cover

Our nestled heads would this mistrust be gone,
Our sudden vision that the tenderest lover
Dreams on alone.

This ashen rain of words, of dead words slowly falling
Into Love's grave that yawns between our eyes,
We know not whence to whom we know not calling,
Is lies.

1920

TOLSTOY

He is like a God, not a Sabaoth or an Olympian, but the kind of Russian god who "sits on a maple throne under a golden limetree," not very majestic, but perhaps more cunning than all the other gods.—
MAXIM GORKY, *Recollections of Tolstoy*.

What secret knowledge, old and cunning god,
Purses your eyes in their inhuman leer ?
What grim disdain lurks in your hateful nod,
What arrogance, and what more awful fear
Of things we cannot see,
Strong spirit of the tree,
Who knows wherein the roots are set of all mortality ?

Whence camest thou, a mortal man in seeming,
Speaking our tongue, supreme in all our skill,
To spurn them both aside for thy dread dreaming
Of the ungovernable, mighty Will
That sent thee to deride
The triumphs of our pride
And pierce our hearts with terror of thine own eyes
terrified ?

What centaur-king at battle with the beasts
Begot thee in the flush of victory
Upon what fierce-eyed queen ? What drunken feasts
Within the matted walls once drowned the cry
Of the swift ravishment
Of her whose pride was bent
To hide the seed that bore thee in the darkness of his
tent ?

The wild-maned horses neighed thee to thy rest ;
The jackals howled their hunger round the horde
While thy fierce mother clutched thee to her breast,
Suckling a chieftain worthy of her lord
Whose bloody hand had led
Her captive to his bed,
Bidding her raise up new kinsmen in the men she bore
and bred.

Through what unnumbered ages hast thou sped,
Thou mighty horseman, o'er the Asian plain ?
What teeming tribes of nomads hast thou led
To battle and to plunder and to pain ?
Slant-eyed watcher of the nights,
Master of creeping fights,
To what god what victims gav'st thou in thy sacrificial
rites ?

He was thy sire who would not to the tomb,
At whose dark terrors his grim spirit quailed,
Go comfortless ; but took to share his doom
A thousand warriors on their steeds impaled,
Who girded him around
In the darkness of his mound
To be his guard against the fang of death's grey,
ghostly hound.

Not of thy kin was he who dreamed to hear
The spinning stars make heavenly harmony,
Obedient in sweet celestial fear

To love that lasts to all eternity ;
To thine the stars gave light
To aid them in the fight,
And guide their fearful courses through the menace of
the night.

And when the unending journey came to rest
Thou slumbered still, still shaped within thy sleep,
In the proud loins of men who to the West
Turned scornful eyes to mark where they might reap
A harvest from the mind
Their wandering as a wind
Had suffered them not pause to sow with dreams of
humankind.

As men who rush into a new-found land,
They stormed the gates of dreaming and desire ;
Within the grasp of their all-daring hand
Believed the shadows of the magic fire,
Urging their journey on
Till earthly hosts had won
To peaks lit by the farthest ray of thought's unearthly
sun.

In this dim realm they wandered once again,
Passing beyond the smooth and charted ways
Into a wilderness unknown of men
Where hearts grew faint with hunger and the maze

Of their imaginings,
Visions of shadowy things
Confounded by the ghostly breath of immaterial wings.

The God they sought came not, but thou wert born ;
In thy proud nostrils was the earth's strong breath ;
Thou laughed their baffled wisdom into scorn ;
Thine eyes glanced backward at the hound of death ;
And things they could not see
Struck anguish into thee,
Remembering where the roots are set of all mortality.

After a little space of urgent days,
Wherein thou wert supreme in all our skill,
The memory of the waste, ancestral ways,
The might of an ungovernable Will
Locked the once eager tongue
That in thy youth had rung
O'er Europe like a mighty bell in a high belfry hung ;

Till at the last thou wandered forth alone
To meet thy death where only stars might see,
On the dim plain that echoes with the moan
Of the impenetrable mystery
To which no man has trod,
Nor old and cunning god
Who leers and fears and frights men with the blindness
of his nod.

LINES WRITTEN ON AN AUGUST MORNING

It is the morning now.

Grey-veiled and quenched is every scintillation
Could light some far reflection in the mirror of my
soul ;

A morning meet for low-toned lamentation
Of one who is not whole.

Desires and love burn low within my heart
Dulled by mute anguish for some exultation
That should uplift me, strongly whirled apart
From life and fear of life, in a fierce wind of love
To the high peak of consummation
Whence looking down I might unerring mark
The multitudinous, scattered flames of aspiration
Leaping from out the dark
Toward the knowledge and the steady joy
Of him who stands above
The desert world that bruises the disconsolate feet of
love.

Thence may the soul discern
The ray of loveliness that pulses through the world
Touching faint unperceiving hearts, suddenly aware
Of a deep-springing hope unquenched by fortune
stern ;
Descending visible on sad eyes pearled
By comprehension of their stinging sorrow ;
Finding no utterance in speech
But in an eager faith in each to-morrow ;

A rainbow beauty poised beyond our reach—
Soul's sun athwart soul's storm—gathering the manifold
Happenings of life into the vaulted radiance of one far-
springing bow.

One sole undaunted sparrow
Braves the grey morning cheerful in the elm
Defies the gloomy clouds that narrow
The cold and dreamy realm
Where his persistent twittering mingles with the thin
Echoes of far-off children playing, scorning
The sun that hides within
And will not venture forth to drive the chill rain from
the morning.

Shall no rich gleam invade
This coldly dreaming mind,
Nor frosty silence melt at voices unafraid
Borne undiminished on a teeming wind
From some enchanted vineyard of the South
Where the unbroken bloom of life is softly spilled
Into the careless hand of youth ;
Where morning by love's eager song is thrilled,
Love whispers in the still hush of the noon,
And twilit laughter
Runs swiftly after
To mock the melancholy of the patient moon.

Beyond thought's wan and listless-lapping seas
Lies hid a sun-warmed shore
Of the soul's garden, where ripen slowly
Bright seeds of visions, truths and magic lore,
Desires unutterable and holy
Forgotten joys and frail felicities
To fruits that bend their dreaming boughs to earth.
There in the still lagoon
A slender ship swings dully to the tides
Waiting since birth
For loving hands to load her patient hold.

But all is still, locked in a noonday swoon.
The weed scarce sways about her blistered sides,
The fainting airs can scarce unfold
Her bleached and drooping pennon from the mast.
Only the harsh, swift cry
Of some uneasy bird of plumage tears
The shroud of silence, shrieks to the brazen heaven, is
past
And all is still, more still for the stagnant tears
Of endless dropping fruits that ooze their juices where
they lie.

Weep, barren, dreaming trees
In far, forgotten islands of the soul ;
Weep for the sunken, splendid argosies
Which sailed to take a prince's sovereign toll
Of your untasted wealth of anodyne.

Weep, for the dust-dried lips that vainly thirst
For your unvintaged wine.
Weep, for the joy, the confidence, the pride
Uplifting him who first
Dreamed in his youth of such discovery,
And sang the while his flagged ship dropped to ocean
on the tide.
Weep, yea weep for me.

O fainting heart that failed him in his need
In terror of the grey, unbroken sea ;
Heart that believed yet shrank, and shrinking half-
believed
That dared but once and doubted what might be
In that immensity,
Whispering of sunken reefs and fatal courses steered
By prouder captains long, long years ago
Whose vessels pastured by the ocean weed
Are rotting, rotting slow.

O coward heart whose resolution veered
At the first breath of doubt and courage died,
In that far hushed lagoon
A mouldering ship swings feebly to the tide ;
Your captain lies below ;
His eyes are blind to that eternal noon ;
But he is wept for by the stagnant tears
Of endless dropping fruits that ooze their juices where
they lie.

What voice shall reach him now ?
What courage bear my heart across the dim, grey
waste of seas
To where he sleeps below ?
Surely some wind of hope now stirs his drooping sail
And murmurs in the trees
To hush the dropping tears of years unharvested ;
And surely he has heard an anguished voice which
cries :

*Captain, awake ; the dead
Have followed where you led.*

For their repentance' sake

Captain, awake, awake !

Into the choking silence sinks the thin lost wail and
dies.

The sparrow twitters on
Defiance to the hidden, wasted sun,
Alone of creatures scorning
This solitude of morning
When even the singing children tire of waiting for the
day.

1920

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